

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Bound Compilation of Robert Rauschenberg Interviews, 1985-1987 /
Mazzola, John / Interview with TVB [Terry Van Brunt] and Rubin G., 1987

JAN 7 '89 22:44 RAUSCHENBERG:N.Y.C.

PAGE.01

ROCI, ONE

TRANSCRIPTION OF MEETING FEBRUARY 3, 1987

TVB, RUBIN, JOHN MAZZOLA

After discussion of what to drink and facial hair...
and a humorous story of how to deal with someone you are really
angry at...

JM: In answer to history, what I did was basically...this
studies the period I was with ROCI, but it starts back because
obviously when I first started with ROCI was when somebody,
Michelle Archambault was over there. You and I and Bob had lunch
one time, a long time ago, and at that time I thought it was a
non-profit organization. Then when I first read some of these
documents, one of these memos say, one of the early ones before I
got involved, that either Automation House or Cloud, it says, is
Cloud a non-profit organization? (TVB: NO) well I 'm just saying,
it was an internal memorandum...so I went into this thing
thinking it was a non-profit organization, and as I told you at
the time, what we needed was this board of directors and I
proceeded on the assumption that we were going to create this
non-profit organization or something like that...and then I had
my meeting with Ted Kheel who said to me..."Never, not in a
million years", and so forth. At that point there was no sense in
my sitting around and waiting for forty-six tax lawyers to decide
what was what so my pitch to incorporations was a basic pitch
that it didn't have to be non-profit because corporations can use
an operation like this for promotion purposes and use their
advertising budget. Frequently when money is given to Lincoln

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Center or many of these organizations, frequently the money that is used is promotion money and the way that I created the letters and drafts was that it could be promotion money. But it didn't matter because I wasn't about to sit around and fight that whole battle. That's when I started. When I first started...there was a show last March 25th or something.

TVB: As opposed to next week's show...

JM: Somebody asked me to draft the list and what I did was, I started with a complete list...I put together a list of everybody in Washington. Then there was this negotiation back and forth, which I believe Brenda was dealing with those people down in the National Gallery and they finally ended up with a reduced list. I have never seen exactly what the reduced list is but it didn't matter because at that point I had to do something. So I assumed that they were going to allow you to invite twenty or thirty people from the corporate list anyway. What I did was to prepare letters so that somebody that was being invited to the show knew what the thing was about. And rather than write to the guys down in Washington who were going to come there who I really didn't know, I wrote to the boss here in New York or Detroit or wherever the hell it was saying your guy is being invited to the ROCI show, this is what ROCI, this is why he should go, and used it as an excuse to introduce ROCI to the corporate list. Now we only had a limited number as you know. This is what I think that the list was. These are the people that I know I wrote to.

Then the next thing I did...we spent a lot of time on the

proposal itself, you know we were always back and forth, what is the definition of ROCI, but while that was going on I also prepared a list of Fortune 500 type corporations that A: could afford this and B: were some of the markets. You remember that it was about halfway through that Bob finally came up with his list of which cities were involved. And because we needed a list of something to show these people. So this is the Fortune 500 list that I culled with the guys that were chairman of the boards and etc. that I could write directly to tell them about ROCI and ask them if they would be interested. Actually I sent out two letters. The first letter was to explain ROCI, to explain Bob to these people, to give them a little touch of what the press was so they would be alert to the fact that there is such a thing as ROCI. Then I sent them a second letter in the middle of the summer that said, now that I've told you about it, since then this came out...this is the mystery budget... then out of that list we got about a 10% refusal in writing which is this list. Now, one problem that I had is that obviously a lot of these corporations had been approached in the past by other people and some guy from Xerox really gave me a dose of salts. He didn't write me...anyway, most of the people were totally noncommittal which means, go away, we're not going to be nice to you, if we're interested we'll get back to you. Well again, at some point if you're going to go ahead somebody has to go see everybody that has ever been approached and who approached them and when they approached them and what they asked. It's terrible to walk into the office, especially the guy from Xerox who he was funny because I said I'm noone and later on Don told me that a letter

existed from somebody to someone at Xerox.

Then sometime around the early time in September somebody said you wanted to go to foundations and you were going to send Brenda up here and she was going to be a month at that and I spent a part of that week with her...analyzing foundations, trying to work with her on, because there are better research facilities to get to the real core of these things because downtown there is too much material downtown unless you know what you are looking for. And instead of just listing them what I did was clip these things out of the corporate thing to as a guide whenever anybody goes to them just to know what the hell they're all about. This is just a short list...remember American Express...the guy in New York was calling the guy in Japan and so forth. And these are foundations that have an interest in anything entitled "peace". Now before you can go to any of these you have to have a non-profit status.

RG: Let me interpret this please. The last thing that Don Kocken (?) told us was when we show him the letter we want to send out at that time they'll decide ~~***~~ and basically in general he says they didn't think they'd do it but if it's the kind of letter they can live with then sure. If we had a letter ready to go to these people who would give money to a tax-exempt and showed it to Kocken he would say maybe change this word...

TVB: And Kocken's foundation is what?

RG: Center for Understanding Media. And it's video and film and a long history.

TVE: And this is the last...

JM: This is my last wrap of the letter and this is the one that I took around to the various foundations.

RG: Well did any of them say that if you were tax exempt we would give you money?

JM: In the first place Rubin let me assure you that when I walked in the door I did not let them know that we were not tax exempt because you can't deal with foundations like that.

RG: So they are assuming that we are tax exempt.

JM: A: this project is very expensive from many foundations point of view. In other words, six million dollars is simply an enormous sum of money for any single foundations or any group of foundations to give. I mean that is...that goes without saying. The idea, however, and I'm talking here about the two "peace" foundations that I went to, when I say "peace" foundation I mean a foundation that is not giving to the arts but to improve...each one has a different set of words...sometimes it says international understanding, sometimes it says advancement of peace, whatever it is these are two of these organizations that are basically in that area. The idea of low key personal

diplomacy is appealing in this period of history to them. That is, government to government is not working...major organizations are not working in advancing peace. So they are considering the non-threatening concept of a private citizen trying diplomacy to alter the policies of their various governments. Basically this is what they're saying that this had which appeals to this kind of foundation in this period of time. But you see most of these private citizens, most of the functions that they are involved in are not talking really big bucks. I certainly did not mention that we are not non-profit.

TVB: So after you gathered this information from these people you wrote this letter in the back here...so you never rewrote it after talking with the people.

JM: Because the corporate world is the only world you can go to where it doesn't matter whether it is profit or non-profit. I mean, they won't buy a table for your party unless you're non-profit because that's a particular budget, but the reason I was trying the corporate area is because this is a promotional aspect...get better government relations etc. Foundations are clearly, they, most foundations won't even give to individuals, they have to give to organizations. Almost all foundations. State Council just put out a new brochure that says, our new program for making grants to individuals, and the first sentence says we do not give grants to individuals so you are going to have to find a sponsor to do this.

RG: The biggest fear that Kocken had was that we might go to foundations that they go to and if we get turned down it hurts their reputation. So if we are going to go to peace organizations, he never goes to them, he's just worried about...

JM: Some of these foundations are in lots of different areas. The fact, it is not just that easy...

RG: So that's his big concern, otherwise I don't think he'd have any difficulty. I've seen him many times since then.

JM: John was one of the greatest men in the Jesuit movement for advancing the whole concept of media and...but it was during the '60s. The General Electric Foundation supports almost anything, but they are specifically interested in international understanding, that's why you might have a conflict. Don't be a 100% sure you are not going to have a conflict. I won't guarantee that that is absolutely everybody, this is 90% of the foundations that you're going to find that are interested in this kind of work.

RG: What's the general assessment, is this a hopeless kind of thing that we're trying, or...is there a way...

JM: The only thing that I know about all these projects is that you keep trying til you drop it or the money comes in...the Xerox letter was saying I ain't supporting any megalomaniac or

something like that...and let's look at the negative side...the walls you are going to bounce off. The first one is the person like Meyerhoff who says, why the hell should I help Bob Rauschenberg increase the cost of his painting...in other words anyone that focuses on the fact that this is an activity that benefits Bob. You can't say that this is right or wrong. When you walk in, when you told me about the Meyerhoff thing, I heard that too, that was no big surprise...so you have a wall there. A lot of people have a wall there, this is an enormously expensive project. The choice of places is extremely peculiar. In other words, if you were going to Sri Lanka, Kenya, you know, and Tibet and all these places, then you would understand it...or if you were going to Rome, Paris, Tokyo,...but you are going to Tokyo and NOT going to Rome...it is, from an ideological point of view...we're not going to the big cities...well, why the hell are you going to Tokyo? Why are you going to Australia? Do we have problems with Australia? In other words, you have an ideological problem in the choice of the places. The one thing is, you can never measure results from an operation like this. You can NOT measure results. There is no bang for the buck. If you go back to Tokyo six months after the show there, peace didn't break out. There is no real measurement possible...you have to take these things on faith. These peace foundations will take everything on faith, because you know, they would have quit a long time ago, right? I mean, they take these things on faith and somebody said to me, the concept of personal diplomacy is something we find appealing at this time because nothing else is working. So on the positive side, if you can get yourself a non-profit status,

that would be a focus you can try. The corporate world, I had the feeling after a while, that a lot of people had asked a lot of corporations that I didn't know about...forget the guy from Xerox beating me up...it is just a matter of ...

RG: If you were non-profit, who would you go to?

JM: If you were tax exempt, if you were a clear tax exempt situation, A: certainly you would go to foundations...

RG: Which one would give something like ROCI money...is it peace, is it art, is it humanity?

JM: Peace. Art is not...

RG: But then you just told me, what the hell you going to Tokyo for, why'd you go to Mexico?

JM: It's confusing because you have this ideological problem that's presented to you...

RG: What is the answer to those questions?

JM: Peking, China, Russia, Moscow, Sri Lanka, Chile, Kenya.

RG: But why Tokyo, and why Mexico?

JM: Well, everybody will give you Mexico. Jesus, we're always at war with Mexico. That's not a problem, the big countries are the problem.

TVB: Well, the answer as to why we went to Japan is so simple that no one would believe it. Just that it was a free place to store our art and while it was there we decided to have a show.

JM: That's not one proposition that I would like to try to pitch to a foundation.

TVB: We saved \$200,000 not having to ship it back to the US.

JM: But then we're an economical and ecuminical organization...at this point we're not asking...it's a question of focus whenever you walk in. The price tag is the biggest problem. I don't think anybody has spent \$6 million on any kind of show...maybe Philip Morris spent that much on the Vatican show...\$6 million is an enormous amount of money for a corporation to spend...the Vatican show? You have thousands of people coming through all the time and all the side issues...

TVB: To get all the commissions for selling cigarettes in all the concessions that the Church owns all throughout the world which was an unknown fact.

JM: So \$6 million is always going to be the major battle. There are probably, well I know there are...but you can't get them out

until after you...if one of these foundations...Mertz-Gilmore is probably the first place to go, I mean that's the first place I'd go...Mertz sort of single handedly supports the public theater, Gilmore happens to be the children's name...they're getting out of the arts and getting more into the peace...that's the first place where I'd go and shop...I'd go there and say, what do you think...because I think that once you can get recognized by any foundation then you'll break out with a lot of individuals that would support...

RG: What I had hoped you did with the market survey was by going one to one...and it seems mostly negative, I don't see many positive possibilities, unless this Mertz is a way,

JM: That approach would be a solid foundation basis and you probably would not get much money from it.

RG: Would NOT?

JM: Well, even \$50,000 is better than a kick in the ass. The thing is, once you can get money from one person, then you can start piling it up.

RG: In the foundation world. But aren't they more restrictive, with government control, and you are handcuffed and don't have as much freedom as with a commercial entity? You have to prove with a foundation that no one is profiting. Ted Kheel's strong

arguments and stuff like that. Which you know...there's alot to what he says and a lot to overcome. You don't have all that freedom to play...I could set up all those mechanics so that everything is separate and above but Ted doesn't like playing those games. There are ways of doing it but it is not comfortable. I don't blame him. But it could still be done. So if we knew that there was really people that, wow, sure, that's something we could do, then sure, absolutely, we'll go right in and do it, but to go through all the machinations and be combatted with the IRS guy with Ted Kheel's way of thinking, it would take two years. It took two years to make Martha Graham tax exempt, that was ten years ago. Then there's others I've done that have gone tax exempt in one week. Like EAT, Experiments in Art Technology. And this is not real good company. Because I don't have too much doubt about John Kocken, that's the easiest way of #### as long as it's the kind of letter you can live with.

JM: Well, if you want me to go back to the corporate route, I'd take the same exact list that I used last summer and go right off with them again. Knowing, you know, going back to them and saying, this thing is proceeding, it's developing and so forth.

RG: It's easier for a corporation to give another business corporation money than it is a foundation.

JM: A corporation can spend money on buying flowers and it doesn't mean anything, it's all public relations.

RG: But they're restricted in contributions and can only give 10% of their profits each year. And that's before they even start.

JM: There's no limit on business.

RG: And most of them really prefer to deal with another business type entity. It's just reasons why we kept putting them off.

IVB: Well what about Washington, this next ROCI Japan in Washington. I am shocked that you haven't gotten a list. Because I know I've told our ladies to send it up to you.

JM: I don't know who it is either. I have a preliminary list, as Brenda says, who do you think are people you should invite? Well, I don't know who you are inviting yet. So she sent me a list and I told her like forty of the names or so and I don't know whether she did or did not give to the National.

IVB: Or whether they included it on their list.

JM: In the final analysis, it's awful late. Assuming it's pretty much this list, this group...things have changed now obviously, the oil companies are now absolutely dead in the water...(mumbling through list)...but those are the guys I would go to and push at.

RG: And what type of approach would you take, like your letter?

JM: The idea is always simply to tell the guy what the hell...if you're an executive at this level in Washington you get invitations all the time...the reason I added the letter last time was to say that this is not just another art show...you're really going to see something important and etc.

RG: Let me ask you a question on the structuring of a meeting such as that, suppose you have the chairman of General Foods and General Motors and...don't you think just walking in and hello how are you and maybe like a one to one with someone, or do you have something planned with an agenda for about twenty minutes or something?

JM: Everyone wants to meet the star, right? So last year when I was there I picked up each one of the people who was there that I knew or that I had met or that I knew who he was and I grabbed him and ... well the guy isn't there to see the artwork, he is there to meet Bob Rauschenberg. Somebody has to grab the guy by the elbow...and then you tell him a few things. When you start making speeches in art galleries you have trouble. I mean, nobody listens. People are not sitting down. Just going around with two or three people...

RG: Well what does Bob say to these people? Hello, how are you, glad you could be here?

JM: They ask him inane questions.

TVB: He answers each one of them.

RG: One to one he's the best.

JM: His famous comment to me was, John, you talk in a linear fashion and I talk in collages or something like that. And he was right. People ask him questions. Bob is terrific. That night with those F* cars... talk about stupid questions. But that is the best thing you can hope for. This guy is coming there for ten or fifteen minutes at the most because he is on his way to a dinner or something like that.

TVB: I guess you just have to know at least who is coming to Washington.

RG: It's a Thursday night, too.

JM: Basically, everybody has to be alert to the fact that if you meet somebody, it doesn't matter who he is, he is there for some reason and bring him over and introduce him. That's what Bob is there for.

RG: What I always do at these parties is say, Bob, I'm going to bring over so and so who has been here and done that and whatever

special interest there may be, his grandmother is an artist, etc...that's what I did with the political people.

JM: The trouble with these guys is that you don't know who they are. All you know is that the guy is the VP of some place and you don't know...it's like that guy from the Russian embassy, Sirokka I think his name is, who went up and said oh yes he had studied Bob when he was in school. Bob really cared for that. I'm telling you those were the words out of his mouth. Bob's sure it was a KGB school, you know he is being a cultural attache so I'm sure he got a full scale set of lessons...

TVB: Full scale liberal arts course.

JM: Your work is going to be a little easier, not exactly easier, but I mean, Joe Kockour and all those people are going to be hustling all these people too you see. That's why you ...

RG: That might be the reason why the museum doesn't want you to invite any of their contributors and that's why they want to screen your list. Those people who normally give money to the museum they don't want to be invited if they think they might...I don't know.

JM: Here's the history and here's all this...I would say that somebody...I don't know where the files are...from what Rubin...I've gone through all Rubin's files and now I know that Rubin obviously, and there's no reason why he should, doesn't

have a complete set. Maybe Don Saff has a better on the corporate stuff because I couldn't find anything much in Rubin's file. And obviously if I had known more I would have been able to ask where are they and so forth. I think somebody should do all that stuff. The last thing you want to do, whatever you do with this thing, is to avoid a certain, I mean you're not going to publish this thing, you certainly don't want a whole big discussion in somebody's history...well Rubin said it was non-profit and Ted Kheel said it wasn't...I mean, you know what I'm saying...

RG: Everybody assumes that it is...even Don to this day assumes that it is.

JM: Also. I guarantee that there is a memo in there that says that either Automation House or Cloud will be the conduit for non-profit. Now I didn't make that up because I didn't know what Cloud was anyway. Now if I could find that memo.

RG: Now Automation House in the beginning, Ted Kheel said anyone that wanted to make contributions could give it directly to it. And we got maybe \$2000 through it.

TVB: Well we did a thing with Ann Livet where she put money in and took it out and he said never again.

RG: Something like that I agree, but if it is something like a million dollars or something really substantially, that was such

a cruel thing she was just like laundering money. That would never do either.

JM: Don't tell me anything more, I don't want to know what you are talking about. Now, I will only tell you one last thing which probably will, nothing will come to pass, I was having lunch with a guy and he had read the piece about the Sotheby sale and he said, you know Rauschenberg don't you and I said yes I do. He said, can you tell me what that was all about? So I tried to explain about the sale and the three year, I knew about how many years it was and how many pieces and whatever it was and how some pieces were in deposit and so forth and finally I said that they decided to agree not to agree and that caused this problem. He said, you know, I have a friend of mine who buys artwork for business and such like that. Do you think that Bob Rauschenberg would sell, did he really say fifteen works, or was it twenty over three years for \$3 million? And I said I don't really have a clue as to whether he would have the slightest interest especially after all this. You know, he said, this person would really want to talk to you. I said, well,

RG: Everything is worth pursuing I suppose.

JM: In other words, the framework would be...I mean I don't even know this other person, the guy I know, I know him very well, he because he kept out of a theater..and there's probably nothing to it and it wouldn't pan out...

RG: That's why someone like you should explore these, and see if there's something to...

JM: Well I avoided pushing the thing at all...

RG: Well if it came out of the bushes, out of curiosity, what is it that you like?

JM: If it's absolutely out of the question I don't want to bring it up.

TVB: Right now that's what we're trying to decide...is that a possibility. Seems like we've sort of touched base on all kinds of ideas and none of them have worked and we're just starting back at the beginning now.

JM: I must say that when you really read the whole thing...it's hard to see as you look back and the more that you learn about ROCI, it's hard to see that there was any, I mean, what Bob was doing was clearcut, this was what Bob was doing, this was his idea of ROCI, but then the implementation seemed to go shooting off in different directions...selling the thing to somebody, not selling it to somebody, trying to raise corporate money...it seemed to be shooting off in different directions. Now maybe it was under a very careful control and everybody knew exactly what it was but it just seems to be a little confused.

JM: I think that one of the things that is going to come out of this whole research project for pulling it all back together is, which is important, is to see where it has been. If you decided to go back to all the corporations, you know, knock them all over the head again, you really ought to know who has seen who, and so forth. I don't think the new tax laws make any difference.

RG: Well to be tax exempt makes no difference now.

TVB: I am looking for people who responded negatively. But outside of this, who do we know who you've talked to?

JM: All of the ones that I talked to, which was a lot of them, if they were noncommittal, I don't even count it. I don't remember the letter, but you're too nice to turn down, and rather than mark it as a turn down I just...because I think that plowing the whole field again is a possibility.